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Georgia Southern University dedicates School of Nursing Memorial Garden

October 21, 2015

Georgia Southern University held a dedication ceremony this afternoon for the School of Nursing Memorial Garden that honors the seven extraordinary young women involved in the tragic accident on Interstate 16 in Bryan County in April. The University School of Nursing worked with Facilities Services to create a special area of campus in memory of Morgan Bass, Caitlyn Baggett, Emily Clark, Abbie DeLoach and Catherine “McKay” Pittman, who lost their lives in the accident, and in honor of Brittney McDaniel and Megan Richards.

University students, faculty and staff, and members of the families and community gathered at the garden to remember each of the students while representatives from the University, the School of Nursing and the University’s Student Nurses Association officially dedicated the site. Speakers for the ceremony included Jean Bartels, Ph.D., R.N., interim University president; Barry Joyner, Ph.D., dean, College of Health and Human Sciences; Sharon Radzynski, Ph.D., J.D., R.N., chair, School of Nursing; Melissa Garo, Ed.D., R.N., director, School of Nursing BSN program; and Emily McGuire, president, Georgia Southern University Student Nurses Association.

“When you have memories, you need a place to bring them so that you can reflect and you can do that in a place that’s beautiful,” said Bartels. “Today, we dedicate this beautiful place to think, to remember and to celebrate the beautiful lives taken far too soon.”

Located at the School of Nursing, the garden consists of seven crepe myrtle trees surrounded by apricot-colored azalea plants — apricot is the color for the profession of nursing. The five center trees will produce white blossoms and the outer two trees will produce pink blossoms. Paired with a magnolia tree donated by the University of Pennsylvania, the trees’ canopy will provide shade and protection for those who use it symbolizing the students’ desire to care and protect others.

“The planting of trees to honor another individual is an ancient ritual,” said Radzynski. “The tree is considered an important image of wisdom, knowledge and life. When a tree digs deep roots and grows wide branches, it does so through the abundant love and grace made known by the person who plants it or is represented by it. These seven women exemplified the love, compassion, beauty and grace signified by the tree.”

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